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TAGS: OPRC, KMDR, KPAO, GM

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: MERKEL-BUSH IRAN AVIAN FLU
TERRORISM-ISLAM UKRAINE;BERLIN

- A. Lead Stories Summary
 - B. (Germany-U.S.) Upcoming Merkel Visit O Washington
 - C. (Iran) Nuclear Program
 - D. (Europe) Spread Of Avian Flu
 - E. (Terrorism) Saudi Grand Mufti On Terrorism
 - F. (Ukraine) Government Crisis
- A. Lead Stories Summary

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HEADLINES

Mntefering: This Was A Nice Meeting - Merkel: Very Good Atmosphere (Frankfurter Allgemeine)

Nuclear Conflict With Iran Escalates (Sueddeutsche Zeitung)

More Funds For German Families (Die Welt)

Tax Breaks For Working Parents (Frankfurter Rundschau)

Iran Provoking the West In Nuclear Conflict (Tagesspiegel)

Up To 1,800 Euros Parental Allowances (Berliner Zeitung)

Editorials focused on the nuclear conflict with Iran, the results of the Cabinet's closed-door meeting in Genshagen, and the safety of soccer stadiums. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with stories on the Genshagen meeting.

B. (Germany-U.S.) Upcoming Merkel Visit O Washington

1. "Impossible Return"

Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger observed in center-right Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/11):

"In the predictable future, deeper political tensions will erupt again; a number of issues will peel off the scab of the wound the last conflict caused. America might want to open a new chapter and discuss with the Europeans how the interests of both sides can be pursued and how trouble spots can be democratized. Many Europeans simply want to talk about domestic issues, such as the death penalty, and how to limit America's power. While Europeans like to emphasize the significance of international law and the United Nations, the Bush administration believes the status quo of international law is outdated after September 11, and no longer wants to give others any power to influence the decision over the use of military forces. That is the state of the transatlantic relationship, which Mrs. Merkel wants to calm down. The heat of the Iraq war has decreased, but there are enough issues that could still cause new turbulence and sow seeds of discord, spoiling the new beginning. Mrs. Merkel has already experienced this. She needs a compass in her relationship with America that also works when usual turbulences reoccur."

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2. "Mrs. Merkel Goes To Washington"

Wolfgang Munchau commented in business daily Financial Times Deutschland of Hamburg (1/11):

"In her few months as chancellor, Merkel achieved some foreign policy triumphs, but she also made two mistakes.. The two mistakes are relatively insignificant compared with her success at the EU summit, but they are quite illuminating. The first one was her revelation last year that Secretary of State Rice admitted that the U.S. made a mistake when capturing Khaled el-Masri. Of course, she said

the truth but also snubbed Rice unnecessarily. Her second mistake was her Spiegel interview this week. Merkel's criticism of the camp in Guantanamo is justified and popular in Germany, but after seven meager years of Red-Green, it is an absolutely inappropriate topic to revive in German-American relations.

"When Merkel travels to the U.S. tomorrow, she will get a more cordial reception than her predecessor, but when she addresses Guantanamo, the Americans might only politely listen to her before coming to the real issues. Germany has no influence on issues of national security in the United States. Americans know that Merkel is more open towards them than her predecessor, but that does not change the political realities. The problem with Schröder's diplomacy was not his decision against participating in the Iraq war, but the disastrous anti-American attitude. It will take a long time until German-American relations are back where they were in the 1990s.. For the United States, Germany is not a partner for going to war.. Merkel's European diplomacy is strategic, but the German foreign policy on the transatlantic relationship remains confusing."

3. "Guantanamo"

Bernd Pickert argued in leftist die tageszeitung of Berlin (1/11):

"After five years of the Bush administration, German Chancellor Merkel's visit to Washington is viewed more critically by the public than a meeting with the Chinese leadership. Angela Merkel must make efforts to lose her reputation from the time before the Iraq war as the opposition leader traveled to Washington to discredit

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Schröder's anti-war stance. Secondly, she does not want to experience the same embarrassment as during Secretary Rice's visit five weeks ago, when Merkel claimed that Rice admitted to have made a mistake concerning the CIA flights but the U.S. denied it. Her criticism of Guantanamo was meant to prevent unwanted surprises. Merkel can be glad that the U.S. State Department spokesman rejected her statement before her arrival, because everything that had to be said has now been said, and a relaxed visit can follow. Merkel is not interested in improving the human rights record of the United States but the German-American relationship and her own reputation."

C. (Iran) Nuclear Program

1. "Message Of Reason"

Stefan Kornelius opined in an editorial in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/11):

"By breaking the seals, Iran has now begun its controversial nuclear research, despite all warning, threats, and offers for mediation. And as far as symbolism is concerned, Iran has now also destroyed the last bit of confidence that existed between Tehran and the IAEA.. This should not be without consequences. But what would be the right reaction to this provocation? And what could prompt Iran to give up its course and enter into talks about a controlled use of nuclear energy? If the negotiating Europeans, Russians, and Americans had known an answer, they would not have made such empty and gloomy threats. Tehran

will not change its mind if they threaten to break talks, which are dead anyway.

"President Ahmadinejad is vulnerable in one aspect in particular. His country needs economic cooperation with the West in order to avert a domestic crisis. Only if the reasonably-minded forces in Iran recognize the danger of economic isolation, would there be reason for hope that pressure is mounting and that Ahmadinejad's radicalism will eventually be stopped. Words do not seem to bring him to reason."

2. "The Mullahs Are The Only Ones Who Have Time"

Clemens Wergin commented in an editorial in centrist Der Tagesspiegel of Berlin (1/11):

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"Now the time has come where the Europeans must admit to having failed with their efforts. It has become clear that Iran was only interested in creating loopholes, which allowed the country to make progress with its efforts to control nuclear weapon technology. This does not mean that the European approach was wrong. This approach had to be tested because not even the United States had a better idea..

"The clock has now begin to tick because Iran has broken the IAEA seals. With every test run, with every transformation from uranium to weapons-gradable material, Iran is coming closer to the goal of building a nuclear warhead. That is why pressure must now be increased as quickly as possible and everyone who prevents increased political and economic pressure on Iran must know that he makes military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities more likely. For, in view of the momentary irrationality of the Iranian leadership, no Israeli prime minister wants to expose his people to the danger of a nuclear holocaust."

3. Right-of-center Mittelbayerische Zeitung of Regensburg (1/11) argued:

"Even the rulers in the capitals of the nuclear powers live under the Damocles Sword of a second Hiroshima. But this did not prevent them from earning money by selling the delicate [nuclear] technology. The idea of helping oil exporters like Iraq and Iran acquire their own nuclear power plants to resolve their 'energy problems' has always been grotesque. The Shah planned the construction of 23 nuclear power plants in the 70's, and the technology for these plants would have come from the United States. The nuclear powers themselves contributed to undermining their brilliant power monopoly."

4. Centrist Wiesbadener Kurier (1/11) opined:

"Apart from the question why a country like Iran that is so rich in oil wants to generate nuclear energy: if it were only interested in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, the mullahs could be satisfied with the previous compromise offers, primarily with the most recent one from Moscow for a common enrichment of uranium on Russian soil. But Tehran wants the bomb. Measured by the most recent tirades of its fanatic president, it probably even wants to use it: against Israel and other.."

5. Center-right Ostsee-Zeitung of Rostock (1/11) argued:

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"The breaking of the seals and thus the breaking of the agreements with the EU show that Tehran has taken advantage of the dialogue, which Europe and Russia favored, primarily

by gaining time for its nuclear plans. Iran's confrontational course aims at the political and military leadership in the Near and Middle East. The mullah regime considers the timing to be favorable. The West is not really successful either in its anti-terror fight, in the Iraq war or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In view of an Iranian president, who wants to exterminate Israel and continue to sponsor Hezbollah and Jihad, the opinion that Iran's nuclear program only serves civilian purposes is not credible. The UN must bring Iran to reason, this would still be better than Israel launching a military initiative."

6. Right-of-center Braunschweiger Zeitung (1/11) had this to say:

"It is a fact that Iran's confrontational course aims at the political and military leadership in the Near and Middle East. The availability of the bomb would be a means of pressure with which this goal could be reached. The promise that Iran would only use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is routinely being reeled off, even though it is not credible. And the timing for the implementation of its plans is favorable: The Iraq war has turned into a disaster for President Bush which he can no longer embellish with nice words; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to smolder. A solution is not in sight. Iran is making a fool of the world, which is helplessly turning in circles. The UN can still show that it wants to serve peace. This would be its triumph."

D. (Europe) Spread Of Avian Flu

1. "Permanent Operations Against Avian Flu"

Patrick Illinger opined in an editorial in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/11):

"The flu virus H5N1, which spreads like a bush fire across Turkey, does not leave any doubt that it is no longer solely dependent on migratory birds that appear only at special seasons in the country to spread. Now that the virus has arrived in a neighboring country, Germany must do

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two things: to use all possible means to keep the virus away from its own poultry and prepare for the likely case that the epidemic will break out in Germany despite all precautions.. If the virus finds a loophole to Central Europe, the consequences for the raising of poultry would be fatal for agriculture.. That is why control measures must begin at the borders and if possible even before the borders. Transport companies, airlines, and car drivers must be informed on the dangers wherever they begin their journey.. Even if the warnings that have been made again and again over the past few weeks are tiring, vigilance should not suffer.."

2. "Centers Of An Epidemic"

Joachim Mller-Jung judged in a front-page editorial in center-right Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/11):

"The ninth year has begun in which the avian flu virus H5N1 has been on the rampage, and it seems that the virus, on its way across the poultry populations all over the world, has finally made it to Europe by means of the vigorous support of sovereign states.. During this period, the virus has not only unnoticeably spread to the backyards in eastern Anatolia . We must fear that it has gained a strong foothold in the region and has spread to northern

Africa where infected migratory birds fly to.. The virus has thus far outpaced preventive measures. That is why the rigid measures to minimize the risk of illegal food imports are the only possible answer. We can hardly built on the eloquent silence and the simple statistical data of official sources when it comes to preventing a disaster.."

E. (Terrorism) Saudi Grand Mufti On Terrorism

1. "Sermon For Everyone's Taste"

Tomas Avenarius judged in an editorial in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/11):

"The Grand Mufti could hardly have had a better public. He preached in Mecca before 2.5 million people and criticized Al Qaida, arguing that its atrocities would result in the world equating Islam with terror. Finally, the official Islam reacted without reservations against murder committed in the name of God.. But do the guardians of the holy sites.really agree with the stand against

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religiously garnished terror? At first sight they do. but the second part of the Grand Mufti's sermon does not really fit this impression. since he wants to insinuate that the West is as unscrupulous as the terrorists.. The words of the Grand Mufti, who was installed by the Saudi king, show mainly one thing: How unnerved the Islamic world is, including its leadership.

"The terror of fundamentalists and the military, political, public and cultural reaction of the non-Islamic world have put Islam on the defensive. Contradictions are becoming visible, because people try to find out what is the rationale for terror; authoritarian regimes like the one in Saudi Arabia are now being questioned.. Western research puts its finger also on other wounds: human rights violations, a 'no' to democratization in the Arab Islamic states, the role of women.etc.. If the discussion focuses on the alleged western campaign against Islam, the issue is also the authority of the Saudi rulers according to the motto: those who question the situation in our country are also questioning Islam..

"But in his speech, the Grand Mufti is mixing up things that have nothing to do with each other. To equate the war on terror with the unavoidable discussion over religion, cultures and value systems is careless. It will again serve the terror of Islamists as a justification, for the bomb plotters pretend to protect Islam from the infidels."

F. (Ukraine) Government Crisis

1. "Late Fuse In the Gas Conflict"

Thomas Urban noted in an editorial in center-left Sueddeutsche Zeitung of Munich (1/11):

"Those proved right who warned against cheers and a triumphant feeling, when Kiev and Moscow surprisingly quickly ended their natural gas conflict. In the Ukrainian parliament, a wide front has formed [against the compromise] and the dismissal of the government is now the result.. But it is questionable whether the problem can really be dissolved with the dismissal of the government, since the Cabinet was officially not involved in the new deal.. An election campaign is going on in the country and the parties will outdo each other with new accusations of an allegedly dissatisfying solution in the Russian-Ukrainian natural gas

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war. In the meantime, Moscow, which obviously works for a weakening if not destabilization of Ukraine, can relax and lean back.. The current rift among the parties in Ukraine could also be a disadvantage for the future government, i.e. not a good initial position for the next conflict with Russia about raw material. This will inevitably come, and it is likely that Moscow will then act in a more clever way than in the past and not upset the western Europeans, but exert pressure only on Kiev."

2. "Paralyzed Ukraine"

Reinhard Vesper commented in center-right Frankfurter Allgemeine (1/11):

"The Kiev parliament's ousting of the Ukrainian government is not a normal event for a democratic country but a continuation of the power struggle that started a year ago with the Orange Revolution. Almost unnoticed during the gas dispute, a change of the constitution came into force on January 1, which was the price at the time for the departure of the old and corrupt regime.. The situation of Yushchenko's government would have become very difficult without the gas dispute, but the conflict with Russia and the constitutional change have now turned into a poison that will paralyze Ukraine for months."

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